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Debating Sex: Education Films and Sexual Morality for the Young in post-War Germany, 1945-55

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Summary:

After 1945 rapidly climbing figures of venereal disease infections menaced the health of the war-ridden German population. Physicians sought to gain control over this epidemic and initiated large-scale sex education campaigns to inform people about identification, causes and treatment of VD and advised them on appropriate moral sexual behaviour as a prophylactic measure. Film played a crucial role in these campaigns. As mass medium it was believed film could reach out to large parts of society and quickly disseminate sexual knowledge and moral codes of conduct amongst the population. This essay discusses the transition of the initial central role of sex education films in the fight against venereal disease in the immediate post-war years towards a more critical stance as to the effects of cinematographic education of the young in an East and West German context.

Keywords: sex education films, VD education, post-1945 Germany, public health, sexual morality, East and West German sex education

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INTRODUCTION

Sex education films are central instruments for conveying norms of sexual knowledge and conduct.

With a focus on German sex education films of the late 1940s and 1950s the essay asks how sex education films handled sexual morality against the background of the Nazi experience and how they renegotiated the relation between the individual and the state during the post-war decade.

From the late 1940s until the mid-1950s sex education films feature predominantly two topics:

Venereal disease (VD), its nature and instructions of how to avoid contraction and spreading, and the biology of reproduction. Only from the mid-1950s onwards did West German sex education films begin to expand their thematic scope towards pubertal problems, adolescents' feelings and the relationship to the other sex. While films on the biology of reproduction continued to be part of the sex education canon, VD instruction films came to be seen as inadequate means for the education of young people. Similar developments characterise sex education in East Germany. Films on VD disappeared in the early 1950s, but films on the biology of reproduction continued to be available throughout this period and beyond. Topics other than the biology of reproduction appeared in the early 1960s.¹

This essay discusses how sex education films shaped discussions about sexual morality in East and West German in the late 1940s and 1950s. With particular focus on films for an adolescent audience, I will analyse continuities and changes in sexual moral guidance for young people in the first post-war decade and assess the contribution of cinematographic pictures to the changing emphasis in sex education in both German states. I argue that despite the ideological differences between the socialist East and the capitalist West changing expectations towards the use of film in sex education bore striking similarities.

In so doing, the DEFA film *Street Acquaintances* (*Straßenbekanntschaft*, 1947/48), directed by Peter Pewas, is discussed as a representative example. Commissioned by the Soviet-led Central Institute for Health, the film was part of large-scale campaigns in the fight against VD. The fact that it was shown

¹ For an overview of sex education films available in East and West Germany, see the filmography in Winkler 2014, 255-259.

in all four occupational zones confirms the moral consensus on sex education for an adolescent audience across the sectors.² In addition, *Street Acquaintances* is a good example for the moral imbrication between a medicalised and individualised approach to the dealings with sexuality against the background of VD. The wide public reception across the zones furthermore underlines the central role of *Street Acquaintances* in debates about the reformulation of educational expectations towards sex education films. These debates reveal an emerging critical stance towards the cinematographic education of the young thus provoking discussions about the proper film form for sex education. Although *Street Acquaintances* was an early example for a changing perception of sexual morality from the educational principle of disease avoidance to long-term education aimed at keeping the body healthy, it was only in the 1960s that a similar synthesis between sex education and cinema once again was achieved in East and West Germany.³

PUBLIC HEALTH AND SEX EDUCATION FILMS IN THE OCCUPIED GERMAN ZONES, 1945-1949

Destruction, displacement, allied occupation and the end of Nazi dictatorship characterize post-war Germany. People suffered from hunger, disease and shortage of nearly everything. Under the keywords 'denazification' and 're-education' the Allied powers started campaigns to morally and economically support the reconstruction of Germany. Film played a key role in these programmes. Convinced that film had the power to exert direct influence on its audiences the production of documentary, educational and feature films was of utmost priority.⁴ Informational films on Nazi terror and newsreels on the evacuation of captives of the Nazi death camps were amongst the first topics used in order to induce a sense of responsibility that would enable a life thereafter.⁵ Apart from political education, health and sex education films became central instruments.⁶ Poor hygienic conditions, food and housing shortages, desolate family structures, and a female majority of 1,250

² The age rating was fourteen years in the Soviet sector and sixteen years in the West sectors.

³ On this aspect, see Winkler 2014, 135-180.

⁴ Hahn 1997; Fehrenbach 1995, 65-66; Roß 2005a.

⁵ Roß 2005b, 11.

⁶ For an overview on health education films between 1945 and 1949, see Keitz 2013/14.

women for every 1,000 men were the social conditions that threatened society.⁷ In April 1948, the *Berliner Zeitung* reported that in a single district in Berlin every tenth of seventeen-year olds had contracted VD.⁸ In an attempt to improve these conditions health and sex education campaigns pursued three main goals; firstly health education aimed at preventing climbing numbers of VD infections, secondly it intended to increase fertility rates, and thirdly it focussed on building trust into the state and its health care institutions. At this point sex education amounted to VD prevention.

Only three months after the end of war, the Soviet Military Administration commanded the opening of health centres to guarantee the treatment of the growing number of VD patients. It enforced the compulsory registration of infected persons with the newly created Central Office for Combating Venereal Diseases. Already in spring 1946 order No 30/1946 pronounced the launch of large-scale anti-VD campaigns, legitimating the police to raid public places and pertinent establishments susceptible of prostitution and casual sexual affairs. Governments of the remaining three sectors followed suit and disseminated the orders of the Soviet Military Administration indistinguishably. This was particularly true for Berlin until the foundation of the West German Federal Republic and the East German Democratic Republic in 1949, when two separate federal laws were required in the fight against VD.⁹ As forcible examinations on persons suspected of being infected became legal across all four sectors, discussions emerged as to whether surveillance and social control would have the desired effect of changing people's attitudes towards sex or whether a more pedagogical approach rather than a top-down control system would be more effective.¹⁰ Following Annette Timm, certain phases characterise early health and sex education. In a first phase health and sex education concerned the symptomatic fight against VD by means of interventionist military orders, clearly privileging public health over individual privacy. In a second phase, educational initiatives began to appear alongside preventive measures.¹¹

⁷ Herzog 2005, 68.

⁸ “‘Straßenbekanntschaft: Ein DEFA-Film in Dienste der Volksgesundheit“, *Berliner Zeitung*, 16 April 1948.

⁹ Timm 2010, 195.

¹⁰ Ibid., 198.

¹¹ Timm 2010, 190.

Together with measures to control VD infections, the first marriage counselling services opened to offer advice on marital conflicts, birth control and sexual disorders as early as 1946.¹² In the same year, the Soviet Military Administration issued sex education guidelines for schools. Similarly in the West, the Federal State Association for Combating Venereal Diseases and Sex Education in North Rhine-Westphalia spearheaded the introduction of sex education in schools.¹³ Sex education included the instruction on VD, the male and female reproductive system, fertilisation, pregnancy and childbirth,¹⁴ pointing to the wider biopolitical dimension of promoting parenthood. By providing information on the productive fertile body on the one hand, and the pathological, possibly infertile body on the other, sex education films employed two contrasting educational strategies: the use of pathological representations to inflict caution and a biological affirmative approach to highlight the link between sex and reproduction. The underlying moral message of both approaches was to resist sexual temptations and stabilise a heteronormative concept of partnership and family.¹⁵ Thus, sexual morality was closely intertwined with medico-scientific interpretations of the sexual body.

Sex education films appeared in many formats and styles. Despite their heterogeneity, these films centred on two topical strands, VD and the biology of sexual reproduction, thus underlining the link between sex education and public health policy. In correspondence with broader biopolitical goals, sex education films provided the audience with knowledge and guidelines for self-preservation and promoted the activities of health care institutions. The availability of a number of films in the East and the West on these topics invariably gives evidence to a shared approach towards film and the sex education of the young.

Specialised in the production of educational films, the East German DEFA department on cultural film (Kulturfilmabteilung) produced a number of short films in support of the Soviet anti-VD campaigns. *Sadly, That's How It Is! (Es ist leider so! 1946)*, *Through the Eyes of a Woman (Mit den Augen einer Frau 1947)*, *Our Nation's Tree of Life (Lebensbaum unseres Volkes 1947)* and *Station IV*

¹² Aresin 1991, 76-77; Huneke 2012, 231-247.

¹³ Oestereich 1966, 1.

¹⁴ *Lehrpläne für Grund- und Oberschulen der Sowjetischen Besatzungszone Deutschlands 1946*, DIPF R 935.

¹⁵ This trend is not restricted to an East and West German context but reflected across Europe and Soviet Russia. See Herzog 2011, 100-101.

(1949) were the titles of a number of short films that usually ran as supporting films in cinemas.

Occupying former German film production facilities in East Berlin, the Soviets were quick at hand to set up health film production. In contrast inter-zonal debates on how a future German film industry should look like slowed production down in the West.¹⁶ The educational short films on *VD Reaction: Positive* (1947) and *Fight Syphilis* (1942) were American productions. Licenced by the health department of the US Office of Military Service these titles circulated in the American sector.¹⁷

Preparation for the production of school education films started as early as 1946 but financial shortages and difficulties in organisation delayed release.¹⁸ School sex education hence relied on preexisting films, either from the former Nazi Reich Office for Educational Films (RWU) or from abroad. The films *Formation of Human Life* (*Die Entstehung menschlichen Lebens* 1948) and *Miracle of Humanization* (*Wunder der Menschwerdung* 1948) were another two American titles that found their way into German film theatres. Without fictionalised scenes, the films drew on medico-scientific methods, using microscopic shots and/or schematic drawings, to discuss the biology of reproduction. Similarly, *Fertilisation and Cleavage of a Rabbit Egg* (*Befruchtung und Furchung des Kanincheneies* 1936), produced by RWU, was originally used for “racial hygiene instruction” in schools under National Socialism, but circulated in East and West Germany after 1945.¹⁹ The Allied powers largely agreed on the continuous usability of medico-scientific research and education films and uncritically circulated many of these films.²⁰ Allied censorship deemed medical and scientific films as genuinely rooted in scientific rationality seemingly guaranteeing ideological harmlessness. This consensus across the sectors entailed the mediation of human reproduction as well as most examples of anti-VD films. Hence, films helped to facilitate a biological perspective on human sexuality.

Apart from short and information films on VD infection and its consequences full-length feature films such as *Creeping Poison* (*Schleichendes Gift* 1946), *Street Acquaintances* and *Girl to Woman* (*Vom Mädchen zur Frau* 1950) were influenced by the need for VD education. Feature films on VD often

¹⁶ Hake 2004, 158-162.

¹⁷ von Keitz (forthcoming).

¹⁸ Mückenberger/Jordan 1994, 319.

¹⁹ Schmidt 2002, 145.

²⁰ Ibid., 278; Paschen/Selg/Viering 2000, 54-57.

embedded biological images in a feature-style frame story.²¹ Together with biological-scientific accounts on VD these feature films expanded their spectrum towards social questions about sexual morality.

THE BIOPOLITICS OF SEX EDUCATION FILMS

When Soviet health authorities commissioned a film about VD in 1947, the film director Peter Pewas saw a chance to return to film making. With antifascist credentials, Pewas' first feature film *The Enchanted Day* (Der verzauberte Tag 1944) had been prohibited by Nazi officials, he realised his first post-war film *Street Acquaintances* based on a screenplay by Artur Pohl. Pewas, who was a cofounder of the DEFA film studio in Babelsberg, remembered in an interview that he had felt committed to contribute a film to the fight against VD.²² It was his aspiration to tackle social hardship and related problems of that time in an artistic way.²³

Street Acquaintances tells the story of two young women. Erika seeks affluence and an easy-going carefree life. Unhappy with the austere living conditions in her parents' flat, the promise of luxurious meals and exquisite gifts draws her into shady circles until she is lured into prostitution and contracts a VD. In the second storyline, Marion, a streetcar officer, is surprised by the return of her husband Herbert. As it turns out she has been unfaithful to him during his absence, leading Herbert to seek an adventure with Erika. Unbeknown to Herbert his wife had contracted a VD, he in turn infects Erika. In the end the trio undergoes medical treatment. VD hence is the common theme linking the individual fates.

Other than establishing narrative coherence VD in the film has a corrective function. VD is presented as a life-endangering threat to society resulting from the misdirected behaviour of individuals. The

²¹ The DEFA film *Street Acquaintances* and the two Austrian films *Creeping Poison*, directed by Hermann Wallbrück, and *Girl to Woman*, directed by Fritz Renel, have been approved by the FSK for the use in the Western sectors.

²² Kurowski/Meyer 1981, 46.

²³ "Ohne Tendenz und Sensation", *Berliner Zeitung*, 8 April 1948, 3; Brauerhoch 2010, 135-147; Mückenberger/Jordan 1994, 162; Shandley 2001, 133-141.

film does not morally judge women close to prostitution as it is often known from earlier cinema,²⁴ but rather the absence of a moral sense functions as a trigger that dangerously infects society. The film presents an environment of moral disillusionment. This atmosphere is explicitly addressed in a scene in which Erika blames her parents for their indifferent attitudes towards the Nazi past that have caused these desolate conditions. Eventually Erika decides to look after herself amidst the current public (dis)order. In seeking to improve her situation, she almost blindly follows material offerings. The character of Walter, a journalist who has fallen in love with Erika, is her antithesis. He insists on idealism and moral principles.

In the dynamic between Erika and Walter the film discusses moral integrity as its core theme, postulating the need for the individual to develop the moral firmness necessary for responsible choices. This focus sets the film apart from other examples that tend to present the pathological consequences of misguided, immoral sexual behaviour as a means to induce a sense of “correct” moral understanding in the viewer. To convey the development of an awareness-building process and self-reflection, *Street Acquaintances* centres on seeing and perceiving as the leitmotif. The metaphorical use of mirrors and windows functions as connection between the protagonists’ introspection and their views on society. Participation in the social world on the basis of self-awareness is the necessary vehicle to effectively remedy VD. These motifs are combined in Erika.

The sequence starting with Erika’s detention, followed by her escape from treatment until her voluntary return to the hospital, captures her development from self-righteousness to self-realisation. The scenes in the hospital after Erika’s detention express a critical stance towards the measures taken by medical authorities. In an argument over Erika’s detention, the doctor shows Walter a slide of a syphilitic back to hint at the seriousness of the disease. He holds it against the light coming through the office window to make the image visible. The mise-en-scène depicts both men looking at and at the same time through the slide out of the window at the street. This framing visualises the medical bird’s eye perspective on society through the lens of pathology that tends to neglect individual fates. In the same scene, Erika takes a passionate stance for her generation’s right to enjoy life. The tension

²⁴ Gertiser 2008.

between Erika and the physician, visualised by Erika's distancing from the doctor until she is literally caught with her back against the wall, captures the dilemma of authoritarian state intervention towards the individual (female) body and the question whether these are appropriate methods after the Nazi rule. Despite this unresolved tension, the film at once confirms the trust in medical authority and health institutions.²⁵ The nurse's character of an elderly woman, who takes care of Erika after she has been diagnosed with a VD, establishes proximity between medical authority and the patient and thus hints at a renegotiation of the prior distance.

At this point Erika's misguided behaviour has become apparent but she still lacks the necessary insight and moral self-awareness. Consequently, she escapes from the hospital and seeks refuge in Annemie's flat, a friend of hers. When Erika witnesses the disfigurement of Annemie's back as a result of untreated syphilis, the close-up of Erika's facial expression serves as a mirror for the audience. In a state of shock she leaves the flat. The sight of Annemie's syphilis ridden back triggers a reaction of self-questioning and reevaluation of her hitherto almost instinctively controlled actions. Erika's act of self-awareness is presented by flashback images during her wandering about the streets. Once she is able to see the connection between her personal attitudes and wider social consequences, Erika of her own volition returns to the hospital for treatment. The nurse as the embodiment of individually gained trust into the medical care system motherly welcomes her back. After her treatment Erika and Walter kiss on the street, turning the street into a projection of regained order. The street becomes the metaphor for the German population, which with a self-conscious moral understanding can help to establish an order of normalcy.

Street Acquaintances fitted into the efforts of public health campaigning. Exceeding simple VD education, the film actively promoted health care facilities as trustworthy and supportive institutions. Although paternalistic methods of surveillance and compulsory containment came under critical scrutiny, Erika's recovery through cooperation justified these measures.

²⁵ von Keitz (forthcoming).

POTENTIALS AND LIMITS OF SEX EDUCATION FILMS AND SEX EDUCATION

In the late 1940s, critical voices started questioning as to whether a moral understanding of sexuality as simply cautioning people against VD was enough of a preventative measure. The availability of penicillin curbed the influence of a medically informed morality that primarily centred on VD prevention. From this perspective, *Street Acquaintances* is not only a case in point for a pathological approach in VD sex education films but, as especially the film's reception shows, also points at the coming discussion of how to achieve moral education with the help of films outside the realm of VD.

An article in the *Berliner Zeitung* suggested that *Street Acquaintances* was a sex education film distinct from those of previous times.²⁶ The dissatisfaction with films aiming for commercial rather than educational success was often associated with sex education films of the Weimar Republic.²⁷ In the *Lübecker Nachrichten* one author commented that after World War I "speculation with the lowest instincts has been a gran commercial success (...). Nowadays filmmakers who aim for truthful and pure sex education stand in awe to call them sex education films".²⁸ Indeed, Pewas when provocatively asked whether *Street Acquaintances* was a tendentious film pointed out that he aimed for a serious feature film about contemporary problems. To him, *Street Acquaintances* should encourage self-reflection and preserve love as a core theme.²⁹ His well-intended motives met with the film's reception that underlined the careful and decent way the VD problem was tackled.

Before the release of the film the East German daily newspaper *Berliner Zeitung* praised the DEFA for its courage to dedicate a film to contemporary problems.³⁰ Also Rudolf Wohlrab, presiding the department for epidemics in Lower Saxony, defended the large scale use of sex education films, by confirming his overall satisfaction with the film for the "unobtrusive and decent but powerful enough

²⁶ "Ihre heikelste Rolle: Alice Treff in 'Straßenbekanntschaft'", *Berliner Zeitung*, 12 September 1947, 3.

²⁷ Kadow, *Mann in der Zeit*, 1950, cited in Thissen 1995, 150. On sex and health education films of the first decades of 20th-century Germany, see Kuhn 1988; Gertiser 2008; Schmidt 2000; Osten 2009; Bonah/Laukötter 2009; Schwarz 2011, 12-26.

²⁸ "Geschäft mit der Aufklärung – Ein trauriges Kapitel der Filmgeschichte", *Lübecker Nachrichten*, 10 April 1951, cited in Thissen 1995, 159-160.

²⁹ "Ohne Tendenz und Sensation: Peter Pewas über seinen Film 'Straßenbekanntschaft'", *Berliner Zeitung*, 8 April 1948, 3.

³⁰ "Ihre heikelste Rolle: Alice Treff in Straßenbekanntschaft", *Berliner Zeitung*, 12 September 1947, 3.

way” by which it presented its message.³¹ Similarly, the Catholic Film Service, *Filmdienst*, valued *Street Acquaintances* for its clear message. It reasoned that “a danger of misuse is ruled out in general. Those who hope to get randy by watching indecent pictures will be disappointed”.³² All bluntness and bias apart, as the West German centre right-wing oriented *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* wrote, *Street Acquaintances* preserves the necessary boundaries.³³ Many commentators came to see a decent and clean way as a distinctive advantage to Weimar sex education films when supporting the need for popular films as part of contemporary anti-VD campaigns. The underlying tension between commercial and educational interests, however, continued to be a central focal point either in defence or refusal of the popular sex education film format.

Whereas some applauded the decency, others wished for the film to have featured clearer and hence more persuasive depictions of the devastating effects of VD. Given the relatively long and persistent tradition of medical films, these images were attributed creditability as appropriate means for sex education. In 1951, a female physician appreciated the deployment of pathological images as she believed they had the power for an emphatic presentation of the fatal consequences of VD.³⁴ The head dermatologist of the East German institute for the combat of venereal disease in Thuringia, Peter Hesse, disliked *Street Acquaintances* for failing to explain how VD was caused. Sceptical about trivializing the health risks caused by VD, he suggested that schematic graphical representation as well as an explanation in a neutral language were needed for clarification.³⁵ While Hesse, amongst many others, opted for a medico-scientific presentation which he believed was objective, other commentators gave a hint as to why feature film sequences only held limited appeal for their audiences. An article in *Neues Deutschland*, the official party newspaper of the Socialist Unity Party, questioned the faithful depiction of contemporary Berliners. Critiquing the film for its one-sided characterisation of morally defect people, the author remarked that the film ignored the inhabitants of

³¹ Cited in Benzenhöfer/Klatt 1993, 24.

³² *Katholischer Filmdienst*, 31 March 1950, cited in Benzenhöfer/Klatt 1993, 26.

³³ “Film-Notizen”, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 17 February 1950, 11.

³⁴ “Eine Ärztin über Eva”, *Der Tag*, 11 May 1951, 4.

³⁵ Hesse 1949, 753-764.

the city who kept “clean” despite destitution.³⁶ Similarly, an article in the West German magazine *Der Spiegel* noted that the diverse milieus in *Street Acquaintances* were displayed in crudest black and white fashion. It went on suggesting that surely none of the three cases presented in the film could be particularly typical for the several hundred new infections that occurred every month in Berlin alone.³⁷

With the advent of penicillin allowing for a quick cure of VD and the gradual improvement of living conditions by late 1940s and early 1950s, VD instruction certainly became a less apparent issue.

Accordingly, DEFA refrained from sex education film production during the 1950s.³⁸ Solely films on the biology of reproduction continued in circulation for school use. The long-term use of films on sexual reproduction in the East and the West underlines the persisting belief in biologically informed images as providing factual and de-eroticised accounts of human sexuality.³⁹ Despite the fact that medical explanations continued to invoke a natural link between sex and reproduction, VD education films no longer shaped large scale public health campaigns.

By contrast, in West Germany full-length VD films featured in cinemas up until the early to the mid-1960s. Most of the titles distributed throughout the 1950s were not commissioned by national health bodies but were rather the products of commercial production companies.⁴⁰ The reports of the Voluntary Self Control (Freiwillige Selbstkontrolle, hereafter FSK), a body that evaluated films for the release to an underage audience, confirmed the interest of film producers in having VD films additionally released for younger people, once they had become an economically important target group. However, concerns as to whether popular sex education films were suitable tools for the education of young people prevailed. The growing scepticism towards popular VD films is reflected in the FSK evaluation reports. In 1959, the proposal for the re-release of Erich Kobler’s 1951 VD film *Eve and the Gynaecologist* for teenagers under the age of eighteen to the FSK was dropped.⁴¹ The evaluation committee had decided that the requirements for such a film were out-dated and the

³⁶ “Kennt ihr euch überhaupt”, *Neues Deutschland*, 15 April 1948, 3.

³⁷ “Treffpunkt Gesundheitsamt: Kennt Ihr Euch überhaupt?”, *Der Spiegel*, 17 April 1948, 24.

³⁸ Bundesarchiv-Filmarchiv/Defa Stiftung 2001.

³⁹ Winkler 2014, 79-89.

⁴⁰ Thissen 1995, 337-340; Deutsches Institut für Filmkunde 1953/54.

⁴¹ FSK file on “Eva und der Frauenarzt”; FSK to Union Warengesellschaft, 11 December 1959, 1.

intended effect of deterrence had lost its educational impact under the changed circumstances. It was not only the topic itself but also the film form that was criticized. The report specified that its objections pertained to “all close-ups and closer shots wherein genitals or other body parts that are infested or destroyed by VD appear”.⁴² Moreover, this film, as the report went on, compromised and corrupted the ethical values of the youth.⁴³ For the same reasons, the FSK denied the rerelease of *Creeping Poison* for adolescents in the mid-1950s⁴⁴ and again rejected the release of *Enemy in the Blood* (Feind im Blut, 1957) for children and adolescents.⁴⁵ Under these circumstances films that were motivated by an economic interest and used explicit imagery of the effects of VD became contested objects in a debate about the moral education of young people in sexual matters.

Going hand in hand with discussions about the appropriate form of sex education films, sex educators, primarily physicians at that time, emphasised that sex education needed to be understood as part of the general education of children and young people, leading the way towards a more critical understanding of mass media and their possible negative influences. In 1953, the East German neurologist Hanns Schwarz insisted on the importance of providing sex education from an early age on so that young people would not mistake sex for love. To him, films on VD left important issues unsaid.⁴⁶ Also, Swiss born neurologist and Christian marriage counsellor, Theodor Bovet, urged that sex education was not simply about avoiding illnesses but about how to keep the body healthy. To him, the adherence to certain rules of life was constituent to maintaining personal and emotional health.⁴⁷ In this vein, another Christian commentator questioned the suitability of films for sex education at all. A mass medium, he argued, could never be beneficial to individual character formation. If young people received appropriate education towards Christian family values, sex education films would be rendered useless.⁴⁸ The question emerging was what environmental

⁴² FSK report No 2603, 6 October 1959, 1.

⁴³ FSK report No 1662-S, 2603: After an appeal on behalf of the Union Warenhandelsgesellschaft (Munich) on 12 October 1959, the main committee of the FSK instigated a reevaluation of the film. See FSK report, 6 November 1959, 3.

⁴⁴ FSK report No 235, 13 December 1955.

⁴⁵ FSK report No. 15 177, 3 September 1957.

⁴⁶ Schwarz' 1953 lecture “Die Sexualität im Blickfeld des Arztes” was first printed in 1954, followed by several reprints. Schwarz 1956, 13.

⁴⁷ Bovet 1953, 4.

⁴⁸ Wasern 1953, 318.

influences corrupted the moral values of young people, leading to reformulations of what sex education films needed to accomplish in order to provide appropriate guidance for the young's sexual development.

Rudolf Neubert, East German director of the Social Hygiene Institute at the University of Jena, identified film, radio and dance altogether as disturbing influences on the development of young people. In order to overcome those "threats", alternative venues for young people where they could properly get to know each other were needed.⁴⁹ More pointedly hinting at the cold war rivalry in 1959, the general practitioner, Siegfried Peikert, warned explicitly against the harmful influences of "Western filth literature and leisure culture", exposing young (East) Berliners to moral derailment. Yet, he also argued that GDR cinema and press should not indulge in erotic presentations either.⁵⁰ In the West and the East alike, educators repeatedly ushered in concerns about the malign influence of mass media on young people. Still in the 1960s, West German educator Friedrich Martin accused mass media of promoting sexual promiscuity, thusly dissuading boys and girls from becoming responsible adults.⁵¹

Shielding young people from harmful environmental influences, including film, was a common strategy towards the governmentality of the adolescent body. In East and West Germany, the principles of sex education had started to shift from a medical-moral approach of prevention to a perception of a long-term training from an early age on. Sex education came to be understood as preparation for marriage, promoting techniques of self-control that guide the will to govern sexual urges. Commercial film in this regard came under critical examination. It was only in the 1960s when cinematographic pictures should shape part of nationwide health agendas again.

CONCLUSION

In the immediate post-war years, public health policy tightly linked sex education films to anti-VD campaigns. This becomes visible in the number of films produced for this purpose. These films

⁴⁹ Neubert 1956, 29-30.

⁵⁰ Peikert 1959, 8-9.

⁵¹ Martin 1963, 72.

demanded that despite the dire living conditions sexual temptation was to be resisted. Sexual morality for the time being was seen as an imperative for public health. With waning numbers of VD infections educators were less ready to support this form of public health policy as VD was not the most urgent problem anymore. This becomes visible with regard of the feature film production. In the GDR, VD film production came to a halt in the 1950s. In West Germany popular VD films formed the subject of debates about increasing commercialization. Going hand in hand with a critical assessment of the educative value of such films, the FSK showed less willingness to release these films for an underaged audience. Morality was not construed between the poles of health and illness anymore but, as *Street Acquaintances* already demonstrates, came to be conceptualized as something that could be taught and integrated into overall education. This change in attitude posed new requirements for sex education films. To keep the body ‘clean’ rather than *healthy* came to be the new focus in sex education that found its wider significance in the debates about pulp fiction. This stance provided a common ground for East and West educators in the education of the adolescent body.

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